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ABSTRACT

This report presents results of a fall 1993 survey of 164 adult education agencies in California concerning their placement procedures for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students. The survey had two purposes. First, the information gathered by a questionnaire (appended) was to provide the California department of education with a profile of current ESL placement practices, including strengths, weaknesses, and perceived needs. In addition, the information was to help inform development of prototype items for adult ESL placement as part of a state project to identify appropriate placement procedures using the state standards for adult ESL proficiency levels. The results reported here summarize information on agency demographics, development and use of current placement procedures, agency-created and commercially-available (list appended) instruments used, administration and scoring, placement decisions and accuracy, strengths and weaknesses of current procedures, and the perceived match of the procedures to state standards. Contains 3 references. The Placement Procedures Questionnaire, a list of responding agencies with ESL programs, and a list of commercially available instruments currently being used for ESL placement are appended. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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California Department of Education
Adult ESL Assessment Project

Adult ESL Placement Procedures in California

A Summary of Survey Results

Andrea B. Kahn, Frances A. Butler,
Sara Cushing Weigle, and Edynn Y. Sato

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Adult ESL Assessment Project

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November 1994

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This report documents the scope and complexities of English as a Second Language placement procedures across adult education agencies in California. The information presented in the report highlights the varying needs of agencies throughout the state and underscores the collective need for a viable and equitable placement testing plan that enables educators to effectively place students into levels articulated in the *English-as-a-Second-Language Model Standards for Adult Education Programs*.

Acknowledgments

This report was made possible because individuals at 181 adult education agencies across California took the time during November and December 1993 to complete a questionnaire about current English as a Second Language (ESL) placement procedures at their respective agencies. The project is grateful to them for their willingness to provide the necessary information for this report to be prepared. Many were available for follow-up discussions which helped to more fully specify the placement procedures being used.

Members of the California Department of Education ESL Assessment Working Group critiqued a draft of the questionnaire and, as always, were available to answer questions and provide insight as needed. (See Butler, Weigle, & Sato, 1993, for a discussion of the role of this group in the ESL assessment project.) Members of the group also provided detailed feedback on an earlier draft of this report. Lynn Drew Bartlett, Consultant in the Adult Education Policy and Planning Unit, California Department of Education, who serves as project monitor, reviewed the report and provided clarification of technical points. Input from the working group members and the project monitor was essential.

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Introduction

In the Fall of 1993, the California Adult ESL Assessment Project conducted a survey of current ESL placement procedures in adult education agencies in California. To this end, a questionnaire was developed by project staff and distributed to agencies[1] throughout the state by the California Department of Education. (See Appendix A for the questionnaire.) The survey had two purposes. First, the information gleaned from the questionnaire would provide the California Department of Education with a profile of current ESL placement practices statewide, including strengths and weaknesses of current practices as well as perceived needs. Second, the information would help inform the development of prototype items for Adult ESL placement. This effort is being undertaken as part of the California Adult ESL Assessment Project (Butler, Weigle, & Sato, 1993) which is attempting to identify appropriate placement procedures for the proficiency levels articulated in the *English-as-a-Second-Language Model Standards for Adult Education Programs*[2] (California Department of Education, 1992).

Approximately 300 questionnaires were sent to adult education agencies in California that receive funding from the federal Adult Education Act, Section 321.[3] Of those agencies, 181 responded, with 164 indicating that they currently have an ESL program. While specific information from individual agencies differed considerably, there was a clear commonality in the attempt of agencies to align both course content and placement procedures to the Model Standards.

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[1]Henceforth in this report, adult education agency/agencies in California will be referred to as "agency" or "agencies."

[2]Henceforth in this report, the *English-as-a-Second-Language Model Standards for Adult Education Programs* will be referred to as the Model Standards.

[3]Henceforth in this report, funding from Public Law 100-297, the federal Adult Education Act, Section 321 will be referred to as 321 funding. The purpose of these funds is to supplement basic skills and ESL programs already offered by adult literacy providers.

The questionnaire was divided into two broad categories, demographic information and placement information. The demographic section requested information about agency size, current levels taught, and curricular alignment with the Model Standards. The placement information section consisted of 13 open-ended questions asking agencies to describe their placement procedure and to discuss various aspects of the process, including administration, scoring, placement decisions, accuracy, and perceived strengths and weaknesses of placement procedures. In addition, there were two questions regarding agency willingness to share their placement tests or procedures with other agencies or have them evaluated by testing specialists.[4]

Because the questions were open-ended, responses varied widely and often overlapped with each other, so that, for example, information about accuracy of placement might be found in responses to two or more questions. For this reason, the discussion of the placement information in this report does not follow the exact order of questions on the questionnaire. Instead, the discussion is organized in the following way. First, the development or selection of placement procedures is discussed. Next, placement instruments currently being used by agencies are described. Finally, issues relevant to the placement process such as administration, scoring, accuracy, likes and dislikes, and match to the Model Standards are addressed.

It should be noted that, throughout the discussion, the information presented represents the views of only those agencies with ESL programs that responded to the questionnaire and may not be representative of all agencies throughout California. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to explain common trends in questionnaire responses. The explanations provided, however, are by no means exhaustive.

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[4]The majority of respondents indicated that they were willing to share their tests and procedures and have them evaluated.

Demographic Information

The 164 agencies referred to in this report represent adult ESL programs throughout the state. These agencies vary greatly not only in the number of students enrolled, but also in the student population they serve and in agency organization. The demographic information presented in the following section is intended to provide a better understanding of these differences, particularly with regard to agency size, current levels taught, and degree of alignment with the Model Standards.

Respondents

Agencies with ESL programs that responded to the questionnaire are listed in Appendix B. The positions the respondents hold at their respective agencies are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent Positions

Position	Number of Agencies
Administrator	68
Coordinator	48
Resource specialist	16
Instructor	13
Other staff[a]	16
No response	3
	164

[a]Other staff positions include registrar, library technician, project assistant, counselor.

The questionnaire was most often completed by ESL administrators (68 agencies) and coordinators (48 agencies). Resource specialists, instructors,

and other staff members also completed the questionnaire, but less frequently. The differences in the positions held by the respondents show the range across agencies of the type of staff familiar with and responsible for placement.

Agency Size

There are two important indicators of agency size: the number of students currently enrolled and the number of students needing placement per term. While the number of students currently enrolled in ESL programs is a good indication of agency size, the number of students needing placement per term more specifically addresses placement issues.

Number of students enrolled. Not surprisingly, the number of students enrolled in adult ESL programs in California varies greatly across agencies.[5] As indicated in Table 2, the range varies from fewer than 100 to more than 10,000. One agency, the Los Angeles Unified School District, reported over 150,000 students enrolled.

Table 2
Number of Students Enrolled in ESL Programs

Number of Students Enrolled in ESL Program	Number of Agencies
Fewer than 100	29
100 - 500	50
501 - 1,000	21
1,001 - 2,000	24
2,001 - 10,000	25
More than 10,000	8
Agency did not indicate	7
	164

[5]In California the size of ESL programs is usually determined by average daily attendance (ADA). Since agencies were not asked on the questionnaire to provide this information, it is not possible to categorize agencies by size according to ADA.

According to the categories in the table, the greatest number of agencies currently has between 100 and 500 students enrolled. However, if taken together, an equally large number of agencies (57) indicated an enrollment of over 1,000 students. It is clear that substantial numbers of ESL students are being served by adult education agencies of all sizes in California.

Number of students needing placement per term. The number of students needing placement per term directly affects the amount of time required to administer and score placement instruments and, therefore, often influences the selection of placement procedures. Table 3 shows the number of students currently needing placement per term.

Table 3
Number of ESL Students Needing Placement per Term

Number of Students Needing Placement per Term	Number of Agencies
Fewer than 100	36
100 - 500	54
501 - 1,000	15
1,001 - 2,000	17
2,001 - 10,000	8
More than 10,000	3
Agency did not indicate	31
	164

While 36 agencies need to place fewer than 100 students per term, the majority need to place between 100 and 500 students. Forty-three agencies indicated the need to place over 500 students per term with three reporting the need to place over 10,000. However, 31 agencies did not respond to this question, possibly because open-enrollment policies and fluctuating

populations make it difficult to determine the number of students needing placement at any given time.

Responses in various sections of the questionnaire indicated that many agencies have different placement needs throughout a term. Thus, procedures appropriate for the beginning of the term, when there tend to be more students, may be quite different from the procedures appropriate during the remainder of the term.

Current Levels Taught

Respondents were asked to indicate the levels currently taught at their agencies. Table 4 summarizes these responses, which are categorized in the following way: Model Standards Level Descriptions, Other Proficiency Level Descriptions, Number of Levels Taught, and Other.

While some agencies indicated the names of their courses, others only indicated the number of levels offered, thus making it difficult to summarize this information. What can be said, however, is that at least 27 agencies are using the language of the Model Standards in defining their course levels, indicating that an initial step in the alignment process has been taken. Comments in other sections of the questionnaire indicated that additional agencies have begun this process (see discussion under Alignment Issues), but the degree to which course levels at these agencies match the Model Standards descriptions cannot be determined from the information provided.

Twenty-eight agencies indicated teaching beginning and/or intermediate levels only. Moreover, of those agencies that are using the language of the Model Standards, six are not teaching advanced-high courses and one is teaching neither advanced-high nor advanced-low courses. It is also likely that the 27 agencies that reported teaching from two to five

Table 4
Description of Current Levels Taught

Description of Current Levels Taught	Number of Agencies
Model Standards Level Descriptions	*27*
All 7 Model Standards levels	17
All Model Standards levels except advanced high	6
All Model Standards levels except beginning literacy	3
All Model Standards levels except advanced low/high	1
Other Proficiency Level Descriptions	*68*
Beginning, intermediate, and advanced	37
Beginning and/or intermediate only	28
Literacy only	2
Intermediate and advanced only	1
Number of Levels Taught	*59*
2-5 levels	27
6-7 levels	23
All levels	9
Other (includes multi-level classes, individual tutoring)	*10*
TOTAL	164

levels have only beginning- and intermediate-level courses. The fact that these agencies do not apparently offer higher-level courses could result from a difference in terminology (e.g., advanced skills are taught in courses that are multilevel or have different titles); or, more likely, these agencies simply do not have sufficient enrollment or funding to support advanced-level courses.

Very few agencies indicated a one-on-one tutoring situation or multilevel classes, although from other responses it is clear that these situations are common realities, particularly for agencies that focus primarily on basic literacy. For these agencies, placement may be of lesser concern since it is fairly easy to make adjustments on an individual basis without having

to disrupt class schedules and rosters; nevertheless, placement information is needed by these agencies in order to appropriately target instruction and select materials.

Although responses varied considerably across agencies, the levels currently being taught along with the number of students needing placement per term help paint a complex but realistic picture of the varying placement needs across agencies.

Alignment Issues

While some information about agency degree of alignment with the Model Standards was gleaned from the level descriptions above, further information was obtained from the questions dealing directly with alignment issues. Agencies were first asked to indicate the extent to which their ESL courses are currently aligned (completely, partially, or not at all) with the proficiency levels in the Model Standards. Then, if their courses were not already aligned, they were asked to indicate their expected date of alignment.

Agency responses to the first question are summarized in Table 5, which shows the reported degree of alignment by number of agencies.

Table 5
Agency Indication of Degree of Alignment with Model Standards

Degree of Alignment	Number of Agencies
Completely aligned	34
Almost completely aligned	11
Partially aligned	100
Not at all aligned	16
Agency did not indicate	3
	164

Although "almost completely aligned" was not an option, 11 agencies offered this answer to emphasize that they are actively involved in the process of aligning or to indicate that their courses have been renamed, but curricular changes have not yet been implemented. Complete or almost complete alignment was reported by 45 agencies, while the majority (100 agencies) indicated partial alignment. Only a small number (16) indicated that they are currently not at all aligned.

Agencies reporting complete or almost complete alignment were usually adult schools or community colleges, while those that reported not being aligned at all were usually smaller (fewer than 130 students enrolled), community-based organizations. In fact, when these agencies were asked when they anticipated being aligned with the Model Standards, 10 out of 16 did not provide an expected date for alignment. Of these, two agencies did not respond at all, but eight provided an alternative explanation. While some pointed out that they were not sure what the Model Standards were, others were concerned with the difficulty of aligning due to the small number of students enrolled or the nature of their program. As one agency explained, the "program is so small and fluctuates with the numbers, it is difficult to estimate." Another agency, which works primarily with basic literacy skills, clearly stated it has "no plans for alignment." Whether such problems are due to lack of information or different program goals is unclear. Nevertheless, if alignment with the Model Standards is a California Department of Education goal, efforts should continue to be made to ensure that agencies are aware of and have access to the Model Standards.

Though these issues seem to be most common for agencies that are reportedly not at all aligned, a few of the agencies that reported partial alignment seem to have similar problems regarding implementation of the

Model Standards, particularly agencies that have literacy and vocational programs. One of these agencies stated that "as a vocational training school, alignment depends on the extent that we can make our vocational curriculum meet the Model Standards."

Despite the difficulties some agencies may be facing in aligning proficiency levels and curricula to the Model Standards, most agencies that responded to the questionnaire plan to be aligned well before the July 1995 deadline required by the state. Expected alignment dates are reported in Table 6.

Table 6
Expected Date of Alignment for Agencies That Responded to the Questionnaire

Expected Alignment	Number of Agencies	Expected Alignment	Number of Agencies
Already aligned	34	Spring 1995	1
Soon	2	Summer 1995	7
In progress	6	Fall 1995	8
Spring 1994	16	Summer 1996	1
Summer 1994	23	1997	1
Fall 1994	28	Alternative explanation	13
Winter 1995	5	No response	19
			164

Of the 130 agencies that did not report complete alignment, 47 plan on completing the alignment process by Summer 1994 and 41 by Summer 1995. Only 10 agencies indicated that they plan to align after the July 1995 deadline. However, given the number of agencies that did not respond to the question (19) or provided an alternative explanation (13), it appears there may be some

difficulty in assessing the amount of time and resources needed to complete such a task.

It should be noted that alignment with the Model Standards is an ongoing and complex process which involves a great deal of time and effort. Therefore, the expected alignment dates reported most likely reflect initial alignment efforts with the understanding that the process will continue as agencies fine-tune both course content and placement.

Development and Use of Current Placement Procedures

In addition to demographic information concerning agency size, levels taught and alignment issues, the questionnaire was designed to help provide insight into current placement procedures across agencies. This section of the report refers to Questions 2 and 3, which focus on the development and use of current placement procedures. Of particular interest is how agencies developed or selected their current procedure and how long the procedure has been in use.

Procedure Development and Selection

Agencies were asked to explain how their placement procedures were originally developed or selected. Although there was a wide range of responses to this question, some common trends could be detected. One of the most common procedures for selecting placement instruments was that of group selection or development. Forty-four agencies indicated their placement procedure had been developed or selected by a committee of agency teachers and/or administrators. Another predominant theme was the role of federal and state programs in guiding agencies. Thirty-eight agencies indicated that their current procedure had been required or recommended by 321 funding,

the Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN) program, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) program, or most recently the new Model Standards.

A smaller number of agencies (29) indicated that their current placement instrument was recommended by Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) staff, while 17 agencies reported that their current placement procedure was either recommended or developed by their district, a local community college, or another agency.

In addition to the processes described above, agencies also attended workshops, consulted with other agencies, brought in a testing specialist, or reviewed available commercial tests. Moreover, the agencies that developed their own instruments often reported having reviewed, revised, and field tested their instrument before it was adopted.

Although agencies have arrived at their current placement procedures in different ways, it is clear from the questionnaire responses that much thought and effort have been put into the development and selection of instruments and procedures currently used for ESL placement at adult agencies in California.

How Long Procedure Has Been in Use

The number of years current placement procedures have been in use varies among agencies, possibly due to the time and effort involved in developing placement procedures and the resources available to agencies for this undertaking. Table 7 summarizes the number of years current placement procedures have been in use.

Table 7
Number of Years Current Placement Procedure Has Been in Use

Number of Years Procedure Has Been Used	Number of Agencies
Less than 1	17
1 - 3	42
4 - 6	42
7 -10	36
11 - 15	9
More than 20	3
Other[a]	10
No response	5
	164

[a]Other responses include several years, since beginning of program, since CASAS was introduced.

Seventeen agencies have implemented their procedures within the past year. The changes at these agencies usually reflect attempts to place students into new Model Standards levels more accurately. About half of the agencies surveyed have been using their placement procedure for one to six years, with the remaining agencies using their procedure for seven years or more.

Agencies that reported using the same instrument for a number of years often indicated that revisions had been made over time. Although a few agencies indicated reluctance to change or modify current procedures, many commented that placement procedures would need to be revised in order to reflect the curricular changes described in the Model Standards. In fact, agencies frequently mentioned that they looked forward to receiving guidance from the state in this endeavor.

Placement Instruments

One of the main goals of the questionnaire was to survey the range of placement instruments currently being used to place adults into ESL classes. Question 1 asked respondents to indicate the names of instruments currently being used or to describe their current placement procedures. The instruments described fit into two broad categories, those that are commercially available and those that are agency-made. Commercially available instruments are tests that have been developed for a general ESL population and for which testing materials and scoring information are provided by the test producer. Agency-made instruments are tests and other forms of assessment that have been developed specifically for the agency by agency staff, sometimes with assistance from an outside expert. These instruments are designed for a local audience and are intended to meet the agency's specific placement needs. Table 8 shows the number of agencies currently using commercially available instruments, agency-made instruments, or a combination of the two instrument types.

Table 8
Type of Placement Instrument Currently Used

Type of Instrument	Number of Agencies
Commercially available only	57
Agency-made only	51
Commercially available and agency-made	52
No response	4
	164

Fifty-seven agencies reported using one or more commercially available instruments, 51 agencies reported using agency-made instruments, and 52 reported using a combination of the two to place students into ESL classes. What follows is a description of the instruments that fall under these two broad categories.

Commercially Available Instruments

Most agencies (109) are currently using one or more commercially available instruments as at least part of their procedure. Those instruments used by agencies that responded to the questionnaire are listed in Appendix C. They vary widely in form and content and are categorized in the following way: tests listed in the Model Standards for group or individual placement (pp. 57-58), tests produced by CASAS,[6] tests associated with a textbook series or teaching method, and other commercially available tests.

Tests listed in the Model Standards for group or individual placement. In the Model Standards, general testing standards and a list of commercially available tests for group or individual placement are presented. Of the 164 agencies that responded to the questionnaire, 13 are currently using one of the commercially available tests on this list. Table 9 shows the tests from this list that are currently being used by agencies that responded to the questionnaire.

The Basic English Skills Test (BEST), which has an oral interview section and a literacy skills section, is the most frequently used instrument in this group. Five agencies reported using this instrument, though only one agency administers both sections of the test: three administer only the oral interview and one administers only the literacy section. The other tests in this

[6]Although three CASAS tests are listed in the Model Standards, they are listed as "Instruments for Assessing Students' Achievements" and are not included in the lists of tests for group or individual placement (pp. 57-58).

Table 9
Tests Listed in the Model Standards for Group or Individual Placement Currently Being Used for ESL Placement

Instrument	Number of Agencies Reporting Use
Basic English Skills Test (BEST): Oral and Literacy	1
Basic English Skills Test (BEST): Oral only	3
Basic English Skills Test (BEST): Literacy only	1
Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA)	2
Comprehensive English Language Tests (CELT)	1
Michigan Test[a]	1
Structure Tests - English Language (STEL)	2
Test of English Proficiency Level (TEPL)	2
	13

[a]More specific information regarding which form of the Michigan test is being used at this agency could not be obtained in follow-up interviews.

category are administered at two agencies with the exception of the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT), which is currently being used at one agency.

The Test of English Proficiency Level (TEPL), which has an oral and a written component, is the only test in this category which is currently being used as the sole placement instrument at one of the agencies. The remaining tests are being used in conjunction with other instruments either to complete a battery of tests or to address specific placement needs for upper- or lower-level students. For example, the BEST oral interview provides an indication of basic aural/oral ability and is often used to supplement reading tests. Because the BEST focuses on basic language skills, it is being used primarily at the lower levels. In contrast, the CELT and the Combined English Language Skills

Assessment (CELSA), which focus primarily on structure, are often used to complete student profiles at the advanced levels.

CASAS instruments. Of the commercially available instruments being used to place ESL students, CASAS tests are by far the most frequently administered by agencies that responded to the questionnaire. Table 10 lists the CASAS instruments currently being used and indicates the number of agencies reporting their use.

Table 10
CASAS Instruments Currently Being Used for ESL Placement

Instrument	Number of Agencies Reporting Use
Appraisals	
Adult Life Skills Appraisal	6
ESL Appraisal	21
IRCA Appraisal	9
Customized CASAS tests	7
Life Skills Survey Achievement Tests	11
Other CASAS tests	26
	80[a]

[a]Five agencies are currently using two different CASAS tests.

Of the 164 agencies surveyed, 75 indicated using one or more CASAS tests to place their students (five agencies are using two different CASAS tests). The CASAS Appraisal forms–ESL Appraisal, Adult Life Skills Appraisal and IRCA Pre-enrollment Appraisal–are currently being used by 36 agencies. These tests are designed for placement, but the intended audience and purpose of these tests differ.

Twenty-one agencies reported using the ESL Appraisal, which is intended for use with non-native speakers of English and assesses primarily

listening and reading comprehension.[7] Six agencies reported using the Adult Life Skills Appraisal, which tests reading and math and is intended for use with Adult Basic Education (ABE) students, although CASAS guidelines indicate that the Adult Life Skills Appraisal can also be used for placement with ESL students (CASAS Life Skills Listening Test Administration Packet, February 1993, p. 4).[8]

The IRCA Appraisal assesses listening and reading comprehension[9] and is also designed for non-native speakers. The intended use of this test is to provide an initial assessment of English language ability in the context of United States history and government (CASAS IRCA Pre-enrollment Appraisal Manual, p. 1). At one time, California agencies that were participating in the Amnesty Program were required to administer this test in order to qualify for federal funding. Questionnaire results indicate that nine agencies are still using this instrument even though the Amnesty Program no longer exists and curricular goals have changed.

Customized CASAS tests are constructed by CASAS specialists in collaboration with staff from the agency requesting the test. Through this process agencies can construct a placement test that fits the needs of their student population by selecting items from the CASAS item bank from a specific content area and at a specified level of difficulty. Of those agencies that responded to the questionnaire, seven are currently using a customized CASAS test, and in each case the test is designed to assess reading comprehension.

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[7]Speaking and writing components are also part of the ESL Appraisal, but questionnaire results indicate that they are rarely used.

[8]An overview of the CASAS Appraisal tests, including the information about the intended audience for these tests, was found only in the Life Skills Listening Administration Packet, not in the administration information for the ALS or ESL Appraisal.

[9]The IRCA Appraisal also assesses speaking and writing, but as with the ESL Appraisal, these components are rarely administered.

CASAS Survey Achievement Tests are level tests designed to assess either listening or reading comprehension; each level has two forms for use in pre- and post-instructional testing. CASAS Survey Achievement Tests are currently being used for placement purposes by 11 agencies that completed the questionnaire even though these tests are designed to evaluate student progress and are not recommended as placement instruments (CASAS Life Skills Listening Test Administration Packet, February 1993, pp. 3-4).

The final group of CASAS instruments includes other CASAS tests such as those developed for GAIN and the CASAS Locator Test. There are 26 agencies that are currently using one of these CASAS instruments, which were categorized under this heading either because they are infrequently used or, more commonly, because it was not clear exactly which CASAS instrument is being administered. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a number of agencies in an attempt to more clearly specify the CASAS instrument being used. Some clarification was obtained, though in most cases the exact instrument remained unclear.

Tests associated with a textbook series or teaching method. Tests associated with published textbook series or teaching methods are also being used to place ESL students into adult education classes. Some series, such as *Side by Side* and *Real Life English*, have developed placement tests to determine the appropriate level or book for students to begin their studies. In the same way, the Literacy Volunteers of America, a literacy organization, has developed a placement instrument that determines where students should begin their training. These instruments, shown in Table 11, are currently being used at 15 agencies, with one agency using two of the instruments to place its students.

Table 11
Tests Associated with a Textbook Series or Teaching Method

Instrument	Number of Agencies Reporting Use
English for a Changing World Placement Tests	1
ESL Adult Literacy Scale	1
Intercom 2000 Grammar Test	1
Laubach Way to Reading	4
Literacy Volunteers of America Placement	2
New Horizons Placement Test	1
Pathways to English Placement Tests	1
Practical English Tests	1
Real Life English Competency Test	1
Side by Side Placement Test	3
	16[a]

[a]One agency is currently using two of these tests.

These instruments tend to be used by smaller, community-based programs. Often such programs have small classes or one-to-one tutoring situations, and the coordinators may find it easier to decide which text in the teaching series students should begin with based on the results of the associated placement test.

Other commercial tests. The last category, other commercial tests, consists of 16 tests that cannot be categorized in the above groups.[10] The use of these tests is not very widespread: Only 16 agencies reported using one or more of them. Two tests–Quick Assessment, a speaking test, and the Idea Oral Language Proficiency Test, a reading structure test–are used by two agencies each; the rest of these tests are used by one agency only. In two cases,

[10]For a list of the other commercial tests currently being used by agencies that responded to the questionnaire, see Appendix C.

two tests in this category are used by the same agency: One agency uses both the ESL Oral Assessment and the ESL Structure Test, while another agency uses the Alemany Grammar Test and the Sullivan Reading Test.

Agency-made Instruments

In addition to a wide range of commercially available instruments, several different agency-made instruments are being used to place students in ESL classes. These tests vary greatly in test format and skill areas assessed and, as mentioned above, are often administered in conjunction with one of the commercial tests already discussed. In fact, of the 103 agencies currently using agency-made tests, 52 use them to supplement commercial instruments, while 51 agencies rely on them exclusively to place students. Agency-made instruments can be divided into two broad categories: aural/oral procedures and written procedures.

Aural/oral procedures. Respondents reported using a number of different oral procedures, such as interviews, oral reading tests, dictations, oral literacy screens, and first language (L1) interviews. These procedures are primarily intended to assess speaking ability and listening comprehension, though some instruments assess literacy skills as well. Table 12 lists the oral procedures currently used and shows the number of agencies at which they are used.

Oral interviews are by far the most widely used agency-made procedure, with 85 agencies indicating their use. Interviews vary greatly across agencies in length, format, and, above all, intended use. Given the large number of interview types reported, it would be impossible to discuss all the different variations in this report. Therefore, two representative interview types are summarized.

Table 12
Agency-made Instruments: Aural/Oral Procedures

Aural/Oral Procedure	Number of Agencies
Oral interview	85
Oral reading test	3
L1 interview/assessment	2
Dictation	1
Oral literacy screen	1
	92

Some interviews are intended to be quick screening devices where the student's ability to answer a few personal questions is sufficient to determine whether further testing is needed or if the student should be enrolled in a literacy class. This type of interview is generally assessed holistically by the test administrator, and criteria for making placement decisions may or may not be formalized. Decisions depend on the administrator's past experience and familiarity with the levels being taught.

Other agencies have developed more formal procedures where students respond to personal questions in addition to questions referring to a picture prompt. Often these agencies have developed rating scales or other criteria by which the tester can make placement decisions. Though this type of oral interview is sometimes used as a screening device to determine whether further testing is needed or to determine which specific test to administer, it is usually used to provide additional information in completing student profiles.

These two types of interview procedures described by the respondents represent the extremes (from least structured to most structured). Other variations in current interview procedures mentioned above fall somewhere on the continuum between these two interview types.

Written procedures. The written procedures described by the respondents vary in length, format, and intended use across agencies. Procedures in this category include elicited samples of student writing as well as tests containing some combination of the following item types: multiple-choice, form completion, cloze, short answer, and fill-in-the-blank. These written procedures are intended to assess reading comprehension, knowledge of English vocabulary, writing ability, or any combination thereof. From the responses provided, the format and skills tested in a given procedure were not always clear; in these instances, the tests were categorized under the more general heading, written tests. Table 13 summarizes the different written procedures currently in use and shows the number of agencies which use them.

Table 13
Agency-made Instruments: Written Procedures

Written Procedure	Number of Agencies
Multiple-choice	15
Writing sample	13
Form completion	12
Written test	11
Cloze	6
Short answer	4
Fill-in-the-blank	4
Job survey	1
Level tests	1
	67

Of the agencies that administer written agency-made tests, 13 currently elicit writing samples as part of their placement procedures. The writing

samples are always used in conjunction with other assessments in order to obtain a better "overall picture of student abilities," particularly at the upper levels. One agency explained that the writing sample was implemented upon request of the upper-level teachers, while other agencies have only those students who place at an intermediate or higher level produce a writing sample. These comments reflect the need some agencies have for additional information about higher level students in order to place them accurately.

Alternative procedures. Alternative procedures are also being used to place students. Two agencies reported a placement procedure that takes place over a period of time ranging from a few hours to one week. Students are initially placed in an orientation class where their language abilities are assessed. At the end of the orientation class, students are placed with a high degree of accuracy into the level appropriate to their language abilities. These agencies seem to be enthusiastic about this process because it allows them more time to assess student language proficiency and needs. In contrast, two agencies do not assess students for placement at all. These agencies allow students to self-select the course they wish to attend in hopes that doing so will promote greater student motivation and attendance.

Administration and Scoring

When deciding on the feasibility of any placement procedure, several factors must be taken into consideration, including the administration and scoring of the instruments. This section of the report summarizes current practice with regard to administration and scoring of placement instruments.

Administration

Agencies were asked to provide information on two issues related to the implementation of placement procedures: how often administration takes place and how much time is required for the placement process. These issues, covered by Questions 4 and 8, are discussed below.

How often procedure is carried out. Question 8 asked agencies to report how often their placement procedure is carried out. The purpose of this question was to determine the frequency with which placement tests are administered in any given term. Not all agencies interpreted the question in the same way. While some agencies interpreted the question as intended, others understood it to mean how often the test is administered to each student.

For the agencies that interpreted the question as it was originally intended, the majority reported that they have an open-enrollment policy which allows students to register at any given time in the term. Most of these agencies administer their placement test at the beginning of the term when the majority of students enroll and then on an individual basis throughout the term whenever a new student enrolls in the program. This often means testing takes place on a daily basis. However, some agencies only administer their placement test on designated days. A smaller number of agencies did not mention having an open-enrollment policy and thus only indicated testing students for placement at the beginning of each term.

Time required to administer placement test. The amount of time required to administer placement tests is critical to most agencies given the number of students that need to be placed and the personnel available. Administration times vary depending on the number of students being tested, student ability, and the nature of the test.

Agencies reported the amount of time required to administer their placement test in different ways: Some reported the time required for individual administration, others indicated the total time required for group administration. In either case, there is clearly an attempt across agencies to keep test time to a minimum: up to five minutes per student for individual administration and between 15 minutes to an hour for group administration. A small number of agencies (33), however, reported needing between one and three hours to administer their placement test. One agency reported that a full week is needed to complete their placement process.

Although only actual test administration times are reported, a few agencies also indicated the total time a student would need to be present. For example, one agency reported that the actual process only takes 20 minutes, but students often wait over an hour to be tested. Thus, both actual administration time and total wait time for students are factors that need to be considered in order to streamline the placement process.

Scoring

Another important issue related to placement procedure selection is scoring. Given limited time and personnel, scoring needs to be as fast and easy as possible and, at the same time, assure accuracy. The following section addresses scoring methods and time, Questions 5 and 6.

Scoring method. In any test situation, the scoring procedure used depends on various factors such as test format and the skill tested. Machine scoring is only appropriate for items with selected responses, while hand scoring is appropriate for both selected and constructed responses.[11] How a

[11]Selected responses require students to select from a number of provided responses. Constructed responses require students to generate their own responses.

procedure is scored directly affects the amount of time required for scoring. Table 14 summarizes current scoring practices.

Table 14
Scoring Method for Current Procedures

Scoring Method	Number of Agencies
Hand	95
Machine	30
Hand and Machine	21
Other[a]	12
No response	6
	164

[a]Other responses include not scored, scored holistically, teacher judgment, unknown.

Though machine scoring is usually considered to be faster than hand scoring, the majority of the agencies (95) that responded to the questionnaire score their placement instrument by hand. Thirty agencies score their placement instrument by machine, and 21 agencies use a combination of the two methods. Some agencies mentioned other ways of scoring such as holistic appraisal or teacher judgment.

Time required for scoring. Although most placement instruments are scored by hand, agencies clearly attempt to minimize the time required to score them. Reported scoring times range from 10 to 30 minutes, with only eight agencies reporting that the scoring process takes more than one hour. However, the scoring time reported may refer to either group or individual administration. In the latter case, the total scoring time would increase proportionally as the number of tests to be scored increases. Although the information gathered from the questionnaire was inconclusive, it is apparent

that agencies are concerned that the scoring process be as manageable and expedient as possible in order to promptly place students in appropriate levels.

Placement Decisions and Accuracy

Once instruments are administered and scored, decisions must be made about student placement. Question 7 asks agencies to report how these decisions are made while Questions 11 and 12 deal with the accuracy of these decisions and the frequency with which misplacements and subsequent adjustments occur. A discussion of the responses to these three questions follows.

How Placement Decisions Are Made

Agencies that responded to the questionnaire indicated that placement decisions are currently made by using one or more of the methods presented in Table 15.

Table 15
Placement Methods Used

Placement Method	Number of Agencies
Cutoff scores[a] only	88
Cutoff scores with profiles or tester judgment[b]	38
Student profiles only	7
Drop-off point	5
Tester judgment only	3
Other	5
No response	18
	164

[a]Fixed score ranges which determine placement.
[b]Usually based on an oral interview.

For the agencies surveyed, placement decisions are made primarily on the basis of cutoff scores. They are used exclusively at 88 agencies to place students into appropriate levels and in combination with another method at 38 agencies. When used in combination, cutoff scores either complete student profiles, which are usually based on a battery of tests across skill areas, or support tester judgment.

Cutoff scores are most likely used at a large number of agencies because they allow placement decisions to be made quickly and easily. Cutoff scores can be arrived at in a variety of ways. Test producers often provide cutoff scores for commercially available instruments. However, some agencies opt to establish their own cutoff scores either with commercially available instruments or with their own agency-made instruments to better match program needs.

Though the majority of agencies that responded to the questionnaire use cutoff scores to place students into ESL classes, a few agencies are also using alternative methods to make placement decisions. As mentioned above, tester judgment or student profiles are used in conjunction with cutoff scores at 38 agencies and exclusively at three and seven agencies respectively. Tester judgment is often used when less-formalized oral interviews are part of the placement process. Interview results are used either to confirm placement decisions that have been made based on another instrument or to direct students to higher or lower levels of testing. Student profiles are usually used when a battery of tests that focus on different skill areas is administered. This type of profile consists of the individual scores for each of the skill areas tested. If student performance across skill areas varies greatly, agencies can decide where the emphasis should be placed in terms of making appropriate decisions.

In addition to cutoff scores, tester judgment, and student profiles, five agencies make placement decisions based on how much of the test students complete (referred to as "drop-off point" in the table). Some placement instruments are organized in such a way that test items become progressively more difficult. The point in the test where students no longer attempt to answer questions or begin getting most items wrong determines their placement. This method seems to be common in the oral interviews, and other comments throughout the questionnaire indicate that it may be used more frequently than reported here.

Accuracy of Current Placement Procedures

It is important for both ESL staff and students that placement decisions be accurate in order for students to settle in their classes as quickly as possible. Students become attached to their classes rather quickly and, once placed, are often reluctant to move. Accurate placements eliminate the extra administrative work involved in transferring students, and more importantly, allow agencies to avoid situations in which students become either frustrated or bored by being placed inappropriately. Because funding is based on student attendance, accuracy of placement is critical in that it directly impacts student retention. Question 11 asked agencies to report on the accuracy of their current placement procedures. Their responses are summarized in Table 16.

Though many agencies seem to be satisfied with the accuracy of their procedures (76 agencies described their placement procedures as accurate to very accurate), 50 agencies expressed reservations about their placement instruments, with 39 reporting their current placement procedures as not completely accurate and 11 as not accurate at all. However, it should be noted that 13 agencies did not respond to the question and 25 addressed issues related to accuracy, but did not specify the degree of accuracy. For example, 11

agencies reported that the accuracy of the instrument depends on the person administering it: "If [the test administrator is] well trained and experienced, the process works well." Tester training is always critical in terms of both effective administration and effective scoring.

Table 16
Degree of Accuracy of Placement Instruments Currently Being Used by Questionnaire Respondents

Degree of Accuracy	Number of Agencies
Very accurate	18
Accurate	58
Not completely accurate	39
Inaccurate	11
Other	25
No response	13
	164

Another issue related to placement accuracy is that students with varying abilities are often placed in the same class. This usually happens because students do not perform equally well across skill areas. For instance, students who are strong in listening and speaking may be weak in reading and writing or vice versa. Although there is no way to create a completely homogenous class and, in fact, some differences may be beneficial to class dynamics, it is clearly a problem when disparities are so great that all needs cannot be met. This problem may be minimized by using multiple measures to place students as recommended in the Model Standards (pp. 9, 54) so that students are not placed on the basis of one skill area only.

A few agencies also commented on problems associated with placing higher- and lower-level students with the same instrument. Specifically,

agencies mentioned the difficulty in discriminating at the upper levels, that is, between advanced low and advanced high, and at the lower levels, between beginning low and beginning high. These problems are not surprising since it is difficult for a single instrument to discriminate across the entire proficiency range described in the Model Standards. An instrument that discriminates at the highest levels may be inappropriate for use at the lower levels and vice versa.

Misplacement and Subsequent Adjustment

Some misplacements inevitably occur with every placement procedure. The goal is to minimize the number of students whose level is not accurately identified. In Question 12, agencies were asked to first report how often misplacements occur and then how subsequent adjustments are made. Table 17 summarizes the first part of this question.

Table 17
Frequency of Misplacements

Frequency of Misplacements	Number of Agencies
Never	2
Seldom (1-2%)	53
Occasionally (5-10%)	23
Frequently (15-25%)	12
Other	14
No response	60
	164

Almost half of the agencies (78) indicated that misplacements occur either never, seldom, or occasionally, with only 12 agencies reporting that misplacements occur frequently. On the surface, these figures seem to

indicate that misplacement is not a serious problem; however, given that 60 agencies did not respond to this part of the question, it is difficult to draw conclusions with any degree of confidence.

While a significant number of agencies did not provide information regarding the frequency of misplacement, all but 11 agencies reported on the way subsequent adjustments are handled. Over half the agencies (94) indicated relying on some form of teacher input for making placement adjustments. Although usually initiated by teachers, some adjustments are also student initiated. In either case, the teacher simply recommends the appropriate level and adjustments are made, though a few agencies emphasized the fact that adjustment decisions are made by the student and teacher together.

At 22 agencies, students are retested if an error in placement is suspected. The new test results are used either to confirm original placement decisions or to make appropriate changes. Though some agencies retest with the same instrument, others indicated that a different instrument, such as a level exit test, is used to reevaluate student proficiency levels.

Misplacements and subsequent adjustments are less critical at some agencies due to the size and nature of the ESL program. In fact, 12 agencies reported that making adjustments is not a problem at all due to the tutorial nature of the program. In these cases, when misplacements are detected, tutors merely make changes in the materials being used. Adjustments are also not a problem for seven agencies that have multilevel classes since changes are simply made in the internal class groupings. Students thus do not have to be transferred from one class to another.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Current Placement Procedures

In Questions 9 and 10, agencies were asked to discuss what they like about their placement procedures and what problems, if any, they have with them. Responses to these questions varied greatly across agencies and touched on several key issues related to placement of adult ESL students. These issues have been grouped under the following headings: administration and scoring, test content, placement and accuracy, and student issues.

Administration and Scoring

Issues related to the administration and scoring of placement procedures were mentioned by a large number of respondents when discussing the strengths and weaknesses of their placement procedures.

A large number of agencies commented on the amount of time required to administer their test and the ease with which it is administered. While 61 agencies like their procedure because it is quick and easy to administer, 19 agencies reported that their placement procedure takes too long and is at times "frustrating and cumbersome." This is clearly related to the issue of whether or not the procedure is appropriate for large-scale use. In fact, six agencies were pleased with their ability to place large numbers of students with their procedures, while eight felt that their procedures are inappropriate for large-scale placement.

A number of issues dealing with the personnel required for placement testing emerged from questionnaire responses. At ten agencies the large number of personnel required to administer their current placement test is viewed as a problem. By contrast, at one agency the limited number of personnel required to carry out placement procedures is seen as a strength. The amount of training required for personnel to adequately administer placement tests is another important issue. Though only 16 respondents

reported that tester training is a problem at their agency, responses throughout the questionnaire indicated that many agencies share this view. Although agencies recognize the need for proper tester training in order to obtain better placement results, they are often unable to rigorously undertake this process due to limited resources (i.e., time and money).

The issue of tester training is further complicated by the fact that some test administrators may not be familiar with the ESL program at the agency and, at times, are work-study assistants who are frequently non-native speakers of English. When placement procedures are carried out by these individuals, even more rigorous training is required in order for accurate placement decisions to be made, particularly when oral interviews are conducted. Moreover, training these assistants is not always cost effective as they often stay with the agency for only a short period of time. In such cases, agencies may be forced to simplify their procedures so that administrative or work-study assistants can handle the placement process.

Other issues related to test administration and scoring were raised by a few agencies. The cost of purchasing placement instruments and funding staff to administer and score these instruments is of concern. The quality of the testing environment and the need for a testing room are problems for a few agencies. Agencies also mentioned the need for test instructions that are easy for students to understand as well as test results that are easy for agencies to interpret in order to make fast and accurate placement decisions. Finally, some agencies mentioned a need for flexible placement procedures that are feasible both at the beginning of the term, when there are large numbers of students that must be placed, and throughout the term, when smaller numbers of students must be placed on an ongoing basis.

Test Content

Only a small percentage of total respondents provided feedback regarding test content when discussing likes and dislikes of their placement procedures, but several content issues were raised.

The most commonly mentioned content issue was skill area coverage: 16 agencies reported that they like their test because it covers the skill areas that they feel are appropriate for their curriculum, while 23 agencies indicated that their test lacks coverage of one or more skill areas that they believe are important. Another area of concern is the match between test content and course curricula. Five agencies cited the match of their test content to course curricula as a strength or mentioned that test results helped inform instruction. On the other hand, eight agencies mentioned the lack of correspondence with curricula or the Model Standards as a weakness in test content.

A related issue is the extent to which a test addresses life skills. Five agencies listed the life-skills orientation of their placement instrument as a strength, while one agency reported that their "tests are not performance or task oriented and are therefore limited in providing feedback on the students' capabilities in real-life situations."

Another issue related to test content is the communicative nature of agency placement procedures. Only two agencies were concerned about the noncommunicative nature of their test; however, this issue was frequently mentioned with regard to the match of their placement procedures to the Model Standards (see Match to the Model Standards for further discussion).

Other comments related to test content are the need for problem-solving exercises, lack of variety in test content, and the inclusion of items that assume cultural knowledge. The issue of cultural knowledge in a language

test is complex because language is always used within some cultural context. The challenge is to develop or select language tests that minimize the impact of cultural knowledge that is not relevant to the kind of language being assessed.

Placement and Accuracy

Agencies often mentioned issues related to student placement and the accuracy of student placement when discussing what they like and dislike about their current placement procedures. Though 45 agencies reported that what they liked most about their placement procedure is that it is accurate and reliable, 18 agencies considered their instruments to be inadequate and, at times, unreliable. Moreover, five agencies cited lack of discrimination between levels as one of the weaknesses of their placement instrument. These agencies noted that their instrument fails to discriminate either at higher or lower levels.

A few agencies pointed out that placement decisions are often subjective. This issue is related to tester training and clearly affects the accuracy of placement decisions. Other agencies cited the overuse of placement instruments as a problem because students who are familiar with the items may perform better than they otherwise would. As a result, students may be placed at a level that is too high for their true proficiency. A few agencies also reported problems with placement tests that have a multiple-choice format because they feel students can easily guess the correct answer and be placed at too high a level or, conversely, students may be placed at too low a level because of a lack of familiarity with the scannable answer sheets often used with this format.

Another problem agencies have with the accuracy of their placement decisions is that some students may be reluctant to speak during oral interviews or do not answer questions to the best of their ability due to test

anxiety. On the other hand, some students intentionally perform poorly in oral interviews in order to remain at a lower level. This usually happens when students want to start at the lowest level to avoid missing anything, or when they want to stay with friends or an instructor at a lower level.

Student Issues

In discussing what they like most about their placement procedures, several agencies brought up issues related to student needs. One important issue is that placement instruments need to be as non-threatening as possible. Because of the anxiety most students feel in test situations, it is important that students be put at ease in order to demonstrate their true ability. Thus, directions should be easy to follow, tasks should be manageable, and the difficulty level should be appropriate for the population being tested. Fourteen agencies reported that what they like most about their current procedure is the fact that it is non-threatening to students, and seven other agencies liked features that make their procedure non-threatening (e.g., the directions are simple and students can stop whenever the questions become too difficult).

With regard to oral interviews in particular, agencies also like the fact that their placement instruments are personal or individualized. Twelve agencies indicated that this is what they like most about their procedure. For example, one agency feels that with their oral interview "there is an opportunity for students to give input and express their goals and needs for appropriate placement." Agencies also like the one-to-one format of most oral interviews because students feel as if they are getting more personal attention and the support and encouragement they need.

While approximately 20% of the agencies (36) that responded to the questionnaire reported that they have no problems with their current placement procedures, for the majority of agencies, issues regarding

administration and scoring, test content, placement and accuracy and other student issues have yet to be resolved. Each of the individual concerns discussed above was raised by only a small number of agencies, when taken as a whole they present a comprehensive picture of considerations affecting the development and selection of procedures for placing ESL students in agencies throughout California.

Match to the Model Standards

In Question 13, agencies were asked to indicate to what extent, in their opinion, their current placement procedures match the content of the Model Standards in terms of communicative approach and proficiency levels. Table 18 summarizes agency responses.

Table 18
Perceived Match of Current Placement Procedures to the Model Standards

Degree of Match to Model Standards	Number of Agencies
Matches	41
Partially matches	57
Doesn't match at all	22
Unsure	8
In process of revising	2
Other	21
No response	13
	164

While 41 agencies indicated that their placement procedures match the Model Standards in both communicative approach and proficiency levels, 57

agencies reported that their procedures only partially match the Model Standards. Of those agencies that reported a partial match with the content of the Model Standards, many indicated a match in proficiency level, but not in communicative approach. One agency explained that their procedure "seems to match well in the area of language proficiency but not in the communicative approach because it does not test for that." This may be because agencies consider it difficult to find or develop a placement instrument that is communicative in nature. One respondent emphasized this point, stating that she has "never seen a test that places well and is communicative." Another explained that the test content can be made to match the Model Standards, "but a better way to evaluate communicative skills is needed." However, some agencies indicated that their procedures are in the spirit of the Model Standards, though their proficiency levels are not yet aligned.

A smaller group of agencies (22) reported that their procedures do not match the content of the Model Standards at all, usually because they were "developed prior to the Model Standards" and have not yet been modified to correspond to the Model Standards. As one agency stated, "We are just embarking on the task of aligning our courses with the stated proficiency levels; our tests will, of course, need to follow that alignment." Along similar lines, two agencies reported that they are currently revising their placement procedures to reflect the content of the Model Standards.

Finally, eight agencies indicated that they are unsure whether their procedures match the Model Standards, either because they are unaware of the Model Standards or because they feel that they cannot address placement issues until they have finished the alignment process.

The information presented in this section reveals that agencies are very much aware of the need for placement procedures that match the Model

Standards both in terms of proficiency levels and in communicative content. However, changes in assessments frequently lag behind curricular changes. As agencies continue aligning their course levels to the Model Standards, it will be important to consider the degree to which their placement instruments are both communicative in nature and accurate in placing students appropriately.

Summary and Conclusions

As stated at the beginning of this report, the purpose of the survey was twofold. The first purpose was to provide the California Department of Education with a profile of current adult ESL placement practices and the second was to inform the development of prototype items appropriate for ESL placement. While it is apparent from this undertaking that agencies recognize the role of placement in aligning with the Model Standards, the range of responses throughout the questionnaire clearly illustrates the varying placement needs of adult ESL agencies statewide and the different ways these needs are being addressed. Differences across agencies stem from a variety of sources, such as the number of students needing to be placed per term, the student population served, and the amount of resources available for the development, administration, and scoring of placement instruments. Though some differences may become less pronounced as agencies complete the alignment process, many will remain, necessitating the development of placement instruments that accommodate the full range of agency needs.

The profile of adult ESL placement practices obtained from the questionnaire responses has helped establish parameters in three areas

which are guiding the prototype development effort[12]: student issues, operational constraints, and content considerations. Responses throughout the questionnaire emphasized the importance of placement instruments that are sensitive to student needs. Agencies preferred instruments that elicit student language in a non-threatening manner and indicated that issues related to level of difficulty, clarity, and test familiarity should also be considered.

Because agencies need to place large numbers of students in a short period of time and typically have limited resources to do so, it is imperative that efforts be made to streamline the placement process. In practical terms, this means keeping the amount of time required to administer and score placement tests to a minimum, avoiding instruments that require extensive tester and scorer training, and identifying instruments that are appropriate for placement both at the beginning of the term, when there is a large influx of students, and throughout the term, when the number of students needing placement is reduced.

Although many agencies feel constrained by limited time and resources, they are concerned with maintaining the quality of their placement instrument. As a result, the challenge agencies face is to balance operational constraints with content considerations. Many agencies have developed their own placement instruments in an attempt to meet this challenge[13]; however, it is clear from their responses that in order to appropriately place students into the levels specified in the Model Standards they need to address gaps in skill area coverage and the communicative nature of their

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[12]See Butler, Weigle, Kahn, & Sato (forthcoming) for a discussion of the prototype development effort.

[13]Several of these agency-made tests were reviewed by project staff as input to the prototyping effort. (See Butler et al., forthcoming.)

instruments. Assessing language proficiency in more than one skill area and focusing on the communicative use of language allow for more accurate placement decisions and better match the spirit of the Model Standards. By administering placement instruments that are aligned with the Model Standards, agencies send a clear message to both students and teachers about curricular goals and expectations.

The detailed comments provided in response to the questionnaire confirmed that ESL placement issues are a major concern at a large number of agencies. Though agencies appreciated the opportunity to make their needs known, they are clearly looking for guidance from the state in bridging existing gaps in content coverage without exhausting their resources. To this end, this document, which describes current agency placement practices and concerns, serves as a first step in establishing guidelines for the development of placement instruments that are aligned with the Model Standards.

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Appendix A

Placement Procedures Questionnaire

California Adult ESL Assessment Project
Placement Procedures Questionnaire

I. Demographic information

Name of respondent _____

Position _____ Telephone (___)_____

Name of agency _____

Mailing address _____

Number of adult ESL students enrolled _____

Levels taught _____

Number of adult ESL students needing placement per term _____

To what extent are your current ESL courses aligned with the proficiency levels in the ESL Model Program Standards?

Completely aligned _____ Partially _____ Not at all _____

If not yet aligned, when do you anticipate that your courses will be aligned with the ESL Model Program Standards?

II. Placement information

1. What procedures do you use to place adult ESL students into your courses? (Name of test and/or brief description of procedures)

2. How was this procedure/test developed or selected?

3. How long have you been using this procedure/test?

4. How long does this procedure/test take to administer?

5. How is the procedure/test scored (hand or machine)?

6. How long does it take to score the procedure/test?

7. How is placement done from the procedure/test (i.e., cutoff scores, profiles, etc.)?

8. How often do you administer this procedure/test?

9. What do you like most about your placement procedure/test?

10. What problems, if any, do you have with your placement procedure/test?

11. How do you feel about the accuracy of your current placement procedure?

12. If students have been misplaced, how are adjustments made? How often does misplacement and subsequent adjustment occur?

13. To what extent does your current procedure/test match the content of the ESL Model Program Standards in terms of both proficiency levels and communicative approach?

14. Would you be willing to share your placement procedure/test with other agencies?

15. Would you be willing to have your procedure/test evaluated by testing specialists?

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Please return it by **December 3, 1993** in the enclosed envelope to:

Dr. Frances A. Butler
Center for the Study of Evaluation
UCLA Graduate School of Education
145 Moore Hall
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024-9969

Appendix B

List of Responding Agencies with ESL Programs

Agency	Location
ABC Adult School	Cerritos
Adelante Inc.	Berkeley
Adult School of Lucia Mar United School District	Arroyo Grande
Alameda Adult School	Alameda
Alameda County Library Adult Literacy	Fremont
Alhambra School District - Adult Division - Valley Adult Center	San Gabriel
Allan Hancock College	Santa Maria
Azusa Adult School	Glendora
Baldwin Park Adult and Continuing Education Program	Baldwin Park
Banning Adult School	Banning
Basic Adult Spanish Education	Canoga Park
Bassett Adult School	La Puente
Beaumont Adult School	Beaumont
Bellflower Adult School	Bellflower
Burbank Adult School	Burbank
Cabrillo Unified School District	Half Moon Bay
Capistrano Adult School	Capistrano Valley
Career Resources Development Center	San Francisco
Career Training and Education Center	Yuba City
Caregivers	Oakland
Castro Valley Adult School	Castro Valley
Center For Employment Training	Santa Maria
Central Unified School District	Fresno
City College of San Francisco	San Francisco
Clovis Adult Education	Clovis
College of the Desert	Palm Desert
Compton Unified School District - Compton Adult School	Compton
Conejo Valley Adult School	Thousand Oaks
Corcoran Joint Unified School District - Corcoran Adult School	Corcoran
Corona-Norco Adult School	Norco
Culver City Adult School	Culver City
Dayle McIntosh Center for the Disabled	Anaheim
Del Norte Literacy Program	Crescent City
Delano Adult School	Delano
Dixon Unified School District	Dixon
Downey Adult School	Downey
Dublin School District	Dublin
East Side Adult Education	San Jose
Educational Options - Santa Clara Unified School District	Santa Clara
Edward Shands Adult School	Oakland
El Monte/Rosemead Adult School	El Monte
El Rancho Adult School	Pico Rivera
Elk Grove Unified School District - Adult Education	Sacramento
Escondido Adult School	Escondido
Esparto Unified School District - Esparto Adult School	Esparto
Eureka Adult School	Eureka
Fairfield/Suisun Adult School	Fairfield
Fremont Adult School	Fremont

Agency	Location
Fremont School for Adults - Sacramento City Unified School District	Sacramento
Fremont Union High School District - Community Education and Career Services	Sunnyvale
Fresno Adult School	Fresno
Fullerton Joint Union High School District - Alternative & Continuing Education	Fullerton
FV Literacy Center	Midway City
Garden Grove Adult Education	Garden Grove
Gilroy Adult Education	Gilroy
Glendale Community College	Montrose
Gonzales Adult School	Soledad
Grant Skills Center	Sacramento
Hacienda La Puente Adult Education	Hacienda Heights
Hayward Adult School	Hayward
Home Help for Hispanic Mothers	Red Bluff
HRA - Employment Services	Willows
Humboldt Literacy Project	Eureka
Huntington Beach Adult School	Huntington Beach
Inyo County Adult Education	Independence
Jefferson Union High School District - Adult Education Division	Pacifica
Jewish Vocational Service	San Francisco
Kerman Adult School	Kerman
Kern High School District - Bakersfield Adult School	Bakersfield
King City Adult School	King City
Kings Canyon Unified School District - Kings Canyon Adult School	Reedley
LAMP Literacy Program	Monterey Park
Laubach Literacy Council of San Diego	San Diego
Libreria Del Pueblo, Inc.	San Bernardino
Lindsay Adult School	Lindsay
Livermore Adult Education	Livermore
Long Beach Unified School District - Long Beach School for Adults	Long Beach
Los Angeles Unified School District	Los Angeles
Los Molinos Alternative Education Center	Los Molinos
Lynwood Adult School	Lynwood
Madera Adult School	Madera
Martinez Adult School	Martinez
Marysville Adult School	Marysville
Merced Adult School	Merced
Merced County Library - Literacy Center	Merced
Metropolitan Adult Education Project	San Jose
Milpitas Adult Education	Milpitas
Mira Costa Adult Learning Center	Oceanside
MODOC Read, Inc.	Alturas
Monrovia Adult School	Monrovia
Montebello Adult School	Bell Gardens
Montebello Literacy Program	Montebello
Monterey Adult School	Monterey
Moreno Valley Community Adult School	Moreno Valley
Morgan Hill Community Adult School	Morgan Hill

Agency	Location
Mountain View - Los Altos Adult School	Mountain View
Mt. Diablo Adult Education	Concord
Mt. San Antonio College	Walnut
Napa Valley Adult School	Napa
Neighborhood Centers Adult School - Oakland Unified School District	Oakland
Nevada Union Adult Education	Grass Valley
New Haven Adult School	Union City
Newark Adult Education	Newark
Newport-Mesa Unified School District - Davis Adult Center	Costa Mesa
North Orange County Community College District	Fullerton
Norwalk/La Mirada Adult School	Norwalk
Oakland Evening Adult School	Oakland
Orange County Literacy	Orange
Oxnard Adult School	Oxnard
Pacific Grove Adult Education	Pacific Grove
Palo Alto Adult School	Palo Alto
Parlier Adult Education Program	Parlier
Pasadena City College - Community Skills Center	Pasadena
Perris Community Adult	Perris
Pleasanton Unified School District - Santa Rita Jail	Pleasanton
Pomona Unified School District - Adult and Career Education	Pomona
Poway Unified School District	Poway
Rancho Santiago Community College District - Continuing Education Division	Santa Ana
Redlands Adult School	Redlands
Riverside Adult School	Riverside
Robert T. Elliott Alternative Education Center	Modesto
Roseville Adult School	Roseville
Sacramento Chinese Community Service Center	Sacramento
Saddleback Valley Unified School District - Dept. of Adult Education	Laguna Hills
Salinas Adult School	Salinas
San Benito High Adult School	Hollister
San Bernardino City Library Literacy Center	San Bernardino
San Diego Community College District	San Diego
San Dieguito Adult School	Encinitas
San Gabriel Valley YWCA	West Covina
San Juan Unified School District	Sacramento
San Leandro Adult School	San Leandro
San Lorenzo Adult School	San Lorenzo
San Luis Obispo Literacy Council	San Luis Obispo
San Mateo Adult School	San Mateo
San Rafael City Schools	San Rafael
Sandigan California Inc.	Sacramento
Santa Barbara Community College - Continuing Education Division	Santa Barbara
Santa Cruz Adult Education	Santa Cruz
Santa Monica/Malibu Unified School District-Adult Education	Santa Monica

Agency	Location
Selma Adult School	Selma
Sequoia Adult School	Menlo Park
Shasta County Laubach Literacy Council	Redding
Simi Valley Adult School	Simi Valley
Siskiyou County Read Project, Inc.	Yreka
South Bay Literacy Council, Inc.	Torrance
Stockton School for Adults	Stockton
Sweetwater Unified High School District	Chula Vista
Tehama County Dept. of Education - Even Start	Red Bluff
Torrance Unified School District	Torrance
Tracy Adult School	Tracy
Tri-Community Adult Education	West Covina
Tulare Adult School	Tulare
Turlock Adult School	Turlock
Vacaville Unified School District	Vacaville
Ventura Adult - Continuing Education	Ventura
Victor Valley Community College	Victorville
Visalia Adult	Visalia
Vista Adult School	Vista
Watsonville/Aptos Adult School	Watsonville
West Contra Costa Unified School District - Richmond Adult	Richmond
Whittier Adult School	Whittier
Willows Learning Center	Willows
YMCA Literacy School	San Francisco

Appendix C

List of Commercially Available Instruments Currently Being Used for ESL Placement

List of Commercially Available Instruments
Currently Being Used for ESL Placement

I. Placement Tests Listed in the Model Standards

Basic English Skills Test (BEST): Oral and Literacy
Basic English Skills Test (BEST): Literacy
(3) Basic English Skills Test (BEST): Oral
(2) Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA)
Comprehensive English Language Tests (CELT)
(2) Structure Tests - English Language (STEL)
(2) Test of English Proficiency (TEPL)

II. CASAS Tests

(6) Adult Life Skills Appraisal
(7) Agency-made (reading)
(9) IRCA Pre-Enrollment Appraisal
(11) Life Skills Survey Achievement
(21) ESL Appraisal
(26) Other CASAS tests

III. Tests Associated with a Textbook Series or Teaching Method

ESL Adult Literacy Scale
English for a Changing World Placement Test
Intercom 2000 Grammar Test
New Horizons Placement Test
Pathways to English Placement Tests
Practical English Tests
Real Life English Competency Test

(2) Literacy Volunteers of America Placement

(3) *Side by Side* Placement Test

(4) *Laubach Way to Reading*

IV. Other Commercial Tests

Alemany Grammar Test

CALPEP

ESL Placement Test (Ilyin)

ESL Oral Assessment (ESLOA)

ESL Structure Test (ESLST)

English Language Student Assessment (ELSA)

Gates-MacGinite Reading Test (Level D)

Henderson-Moriarity ESL/Literacy Placement

Ilyin Proficiency Test

Ilyin Structure Test

John Test

Steck-Vaughn Placement Survey

Sullivan Reading Test

V. McKinney Toehold

(2) Quick Assessment

(2) Idea Oral Language Proficiency Test

( ) indicates the number of agencies that use the test when greater than 1.